



ACROBATES PYGMÆUS: *Desm.*

J. Gould and W. B. Richardson del. a lith.

Hallman del. & Walton imp.

ACROBATES PYGMÆUS, *Desm.*

Pygmy Acrobat.

Didelphis pygmæa, Shaw, Zool. of New Holl., No. 1. pl. 2. p. 5.—Ib. Gen. Zool., vol. i. p. 501.

Petaurus pygmæus, Desm. Nouv. Dict. d'Hist. Nat., tom. xxv. p. 405.

Petaurista (Acrobata) pygmæa, Desm. Mamm., pt. 1. p. 270.

Petaurus (Acrobata) pygmæus, Waterh. Nat. Lib., vol. ix. (Marsupialia), p. 293. pl. 30.—Ib. Nat. Hist. of Mamm., vol. i. p. 339.

Acrobates pygmæus, Gray, List of Mamm. in Brit. Mus., p. 83.

THE portion of Australia designated New South Wales is the only part of that great continent in which I have seen this elegant little Opossum; and it would appear that this is its sole habitat. In a letter recently received from my friend Ronald C. Gunn, Esq., he informs me that “The *Acrobates pygmæus* does not exist in Van Diemen’s Land; nor in fact any of the Flying Opossums; but the *Belideus Sciureus*” (*B. breviceps*?) “is now not uncommon in the forests a few miles round Launceston: a number of individuals imported from Port Philip in the years 1835, 1836 and 1837, having escaped from confinement, are doubtless now breeding.”

This pretty little animal, the “Opossum Mouse” of the colonists, is very common in every part of New South Wales; but from its nocturnal habits, its small size, and from the circumstance of its exclusively inhabiting the hollow limbs of the larger gum-trees, it rarely comes under the observation of ordinary travellers; it is in fact seen in considerable numbers only by those who really live in the bush, and to their notice it is seldom presented except under extraordinary circumstances, the most frequent of which are the blowing off of a large limb in which it is concealed: if this occurs in the daytime, the animal, being then in a torpid state, does not make its appearance; but if, as occurred several times during my explorations, the limb be thrown upon the traveller’s fire, the little inhabitant is soon driven forth by the heat: occasionally as many as four or five are discovered by this means; it was thus that I obtained the specimens here figured, as well as numerous others which I kept alive for some time; and a more charming little pet cannot be imagined, an ordinary-sized pill-box forming a convenient domicile for the tiny creature, in which it lies coiled up during the day, becoming more and more active as night approaches. Its food consists of the saccharine matter which is so abundant in the flower-cups of the ever-blossoming *Eucalypti*, for which well-sweetened bread and milk forms an excellent substitute. The agility it displays among the branches in the night-time is very great; it not only passes over, around and beneath them, but, aided by the membrane attached to the sides and limbs, leaps from one bunch of flowers to another with the greatest facility.

The sexes are alike, but the female is somewhat smaller than her mate.

Fur short, dense, soft, glossy, and on the upper surface ashy greyish brown; under surface greyish white in some, yellowish white in others, this colour extending on to the lower part of the cheeks and the upper lip; circle surrounding and a space in front of each eye black; ears dusky towards the fore-part, and whitish behind; on the inner side of the ear near the apex and on the apical portion spring numerous long and extremely fine hairs; moustaches numerous, slender, and of a dusky brown; tail fringed on the sides with longer hairs than those clothing its upper and under surfaces.

The figures are of the natural size.